C.H. Waller

Partial Exegesis

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PARTIAL EXEGESIS.

PROBABLY all human exposition of Holy Scripture is one-sided. If the Bible be indeed God's Word, it is hard to see how this can be otherwise. "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." Until "that which is perfect is come," that which is partial and one-sided cannot pass away.

Modern divines would readily allow the one-sidedness of those expositions of Scripture which were accepted in former days. But perhaps we hardly admit our own partiality of vision to the same extent. It is only another illustration of the mote and the beam.

No doubt I shall myself exemplify the same parable before I have done. There is no escape for him who ventures to find fault. But, as a one-sided and partial student, I desire to improve, and would not willingly ignore anything of which I ought to take note. Having made this confession I venture to charge the received divinity of the day with great one-sidedness in the treatment of Holy Scripture, and I proceed to establish the charge.

It appears to me that far too much time and thought are

expended in the endeavour to dissect the human authorship of separate books of the Bible ; and that its organic unity is too persistently overlooked. Our forefathers may have been too prone to interpret passages in one writer by passages in another, without allowing for differences of use and style. But this is no reason why we should err in the opposite extreme.

At present the chief end of critical exegesis of Scripture seems to be to place the reader in the exact standpoint of the writer. Really to do this is impossible. Only by the most exact and careful study of antiquity can we make any approximation to the mental position and the surroundings of men, the last of whom wrote some eighteen centuries ago ; and the first, some fifteen centuries earlier still. If certainty as to the meaning of Holy Scripture can only be obtained by reverting to the condition of its human authors, we must simply wait for the resurrection of the dead. But is this the best way to reach the meaning ? The very persons who pursue the search most ardently are the first to tell us that it is not. When we ask them for the spiritual teaching of that which they have dissected, they are as helpless as ourselves. We are in the case described by Isaiah (ch. xxix. 11, &c.), with but slight difference. " The vision of all has become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed." Deliver it to the learned, and after all their critical analysis, when asked to give *the meaning*, they say, " I cannot, for it is sealed." But if the rest of us are asked to interpret it, without the aid of historical criticism, we are expected to say, " I am not learned." The critics too often reject the received Christian interpretation. We, in turn, reject their verbal dissection. Between us both, what are the multitude of plain and simple folk to do ?

I cannot but feel that the destructive one-sidedness of modern criticism is largely responsible for this state of things. And in particular I refer to the practice of resting the authority and interpretation of Scripture on the human authorship ; and making the authorship itself depend almost entirely upon the vocabulary of the books.

Yet even the vocabulary itself is but partially examined. And when the evidence furnished by the vocabulary happens to point in the conservative direction, the vocabulary is at once abandoned, and the argument transferred to the style. One familiar instance (not perhaps of any vital importance in itself) is furnished by the epistle to the Hebrews. To maintain the Pauline authorship of that epistle in the present day, is to confess oneself an ignoramus. But on what grounds? If the discussion proceeds on the evidence of the vocabulary, the Pauline authorship is established beyond all dispute. I need only refer to the learned introduction to that epistle in the "Speaker's Commentary." The proof is exhaustive, but it is still repeated that the epistle was not written by St. Paul. If we ask, Why not? we are told the style is not his. One might venture to reply, Show me the the non-Pauline style, after deducting the Pauline arguments and the Pauline vocabulary. We should wait long enough for an answer to the request. In the end it must come to this, that the style is not precisely that of St. Paul's other epistles. In other words, a member of the Sanhedrin, and an Hebrew of the Hebrews, the passion of whose life it was to convert his countrymen, is expected to write to them in the same style in which he was wont to address certain Gentile churches, whose knowledge of Scripture and revealed religion was a thing of yesterday! How *could* the style be the same, if the writer were a man of any grasp or education? He was, in fact, a person of remarkable versatility. Personally, I believe the chief reason why men deny that St. Paul wrote the epistle is that one or two prominent writers have spoken contemptuously of that view. It does not look well to set up one's own opinion against theirs, whom all sermondom and the press worshippeth. "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

The real difficulties lie rather in the question, If St. Paul wrote the epistle, when, where, and to what Church was it written? These are matters worthy of patient discussion. It would be beside the point were I to discuss them now. They are by no means inexplicable. And if we cannot solve

these difficulties by the somewhat scanty records of St. Paul's life in the New Testament, there is certainly no other life which touches them at all. Apart from St. Paul, the few personal touches in the epistle are left isolated, with no earthly bearing whatever. Reject the Pauline authorship, and besides destroying all exact exegesis of St. Peter's allusion to an epistle by St. Paul *not written to Gentiles* (2 Peter iii. 15), you have absolutely no alternative in its place. All other claims to have written the epistle can only pile conjecture on conjecture, without a scrap of *evidence* of any kind.

I am reminded at this point that there are expressions common to this epistle and St. Luke, found nowhere else in the Greek Testament. So there are expressions common to St. Luke and St. Paul's other epistles. But it is utterly illogical to maintain St. Luke's authorship, as opposed to St. Paul, on such slender grounds as these. The coincidences between St. Luke and Hebrews may be counted by tens at most, the coincidences between St. Paul and Hebrews by hundreds ; therefore, it is more likely that St. Luke wrote to the Hebrews, than that St. Paul did ! What sort of reasoning is this? But the same generation which is expected to receive this reasoning has also been burdened with a book to prove that St. Paul was the author of the Acts and the Third Gospel. Of course the evidence is the same ; namely, the verbal coincidences between St. Paul and St. Luke.

Behold, then, a syllogism furnished by modern arguments from the use of language. On the ground of similarity of language, St. Luke is the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. But, on the same ground, St. Paul is the author of the two writings universally ascribed to St. Luke. Therefore, St. Paul must also be the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. In other words, St. Paul is only another name for St Luke !

The contemplation of reasonings like this, where the premises of the argument are *published books*, supposed to be put forth in all earnestness and sobriety, may well make us

ask what is the real value of this modern reasoning from style and language, and whither is it likely to lead? If it can yield such absurdities when applied to the New Testament, of which most of us know something; how can we trust it with the Old Testament, where, beyond the Sunday lessons, few people know anything at all?

Not long ago, I heard an argument on the book of Judges in relation to the Pentateuch. The argument was constructed to prove,—I am really not sure what, *positively;* but *negatively*, —that the relation between Judges and the preceding books is anything but what it professes to be on the face of the narrative. But the only proofs were drawn from these parts of the book which touch the question of *worship*. The Pentateuch, or, at least, Deuteronomy, ordains a single place of sacrifice. In Judges, sacrifices are accepted at Bochim, at Ophrah, and at the place of Samson's birth. The same book makes mention of Baalim and Ashtaroth, which Deuteronomy does not name, and so on. Therefore, the loose practices of Israel, as described in Judges, are wholly incompatible with the view that the strict legislation of the Deuteronomy was then extant. All the way through, the argument was based upon one limited set of words concerning religious worship. Nothing else was allowed a place in the evidence at all. I do not think there was any intentional unfairness, or reluctance to be convinced; but the more I think of it, the more I am impressed with the intense *one-sidedness* of the whole method. Why should the broad features of the history of Israel be so entirely overlooked in discussing the relation between their legislation and their national life?

Take a parallel from our own times. Look at our colonies. It not unfrequently happens that men whose early days have been spent in the Christian atmosphere of this favoured country, and in homes where the religious observances are even Puritanically strict, find themselves in the thinly-inhabited districts,—I might say, trackless wastes,—of some new country. What becomes of the Sunday, of the church-going and Bible-reading, or even of the prayers? Suppose one were to write the history of some half-dozen colonial

families, or groups of settlers, whose grandfathers were rigid Scotch Presbyterians or simple English country folk, and compare it with the prescribed rules of daily life observed by the preceding generation in the old country; what sort of parallel would be furnished by the two? Would it be reasonable to argue from the actual life of the colonial grandchildren, that the religion of the grand-parents could only be the development of a later and more civilized age?

It seems to me to be forgotten in this kind of comparison between Deuteronomy and the later history, that the Israel of the Exodus lay, so to say, under the shadow of a single hand. The area of a second-rate English city would have comprised them all. Their organization was perfect; their government centralized and strong; the Divine presence openly manifested; at least, this is the picture which contemporary records have presented to our view. Every transgression and disobedience received condign punishment at once. There was no difficulty in this. But two generations later this small handful of people, or, rather, their grand-children, were dispersed over the whole of Palestine,—a country, I will not say partially civilized, but very partially cleared. The very seat of Joshua's government was seriously menaced by wild beasts as much as *seven centuries later* (2 Kings xvii. 24, 25).

Now, what should we naturally expect under such a condition of affairs? What *could* we expect but a relapse into something like barbarism? Without churches or schools, or anything that could be called education; a few persons, who were supposed to teach, scattered in forty-eight places at uneven distances throughout the country, themselves colonists like the rest; with numerous idols and shrines still standing, and idolatrous worship continued by the natives in every part; what else *could* happen in the nature of things, *except* a loss of the religion of Sinai and of Moses' life? It would have been a moral miracle had it happened otherwise.

What else is the actual record of the book of Judges, taken as it stands? The seed sown in Canaan, sparsely and sparingly, is at first choked by the rank vegetation of the half-cultivated wild. But when it begins to spring up here and

there, what appearance does it present? However imperfect and poor the crop may be, it always recalls the features of the original plant. It is not a new religion that meets us, but vague recollections of the old religion. Single precepts are pushed to extremities, as the extermination of the idolaters, like Eglon and his followers, or Sisera, or the inhabitants of Laish; but *not* the considerate immunity of the rest of the Deuteronomic code. In the war of Benjamin, the harsher features of the Mosaic legislation are reproduced to the letter. But the religion of Micah,—"Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest,"—is just the vague recollection that we should expect in a matter of the kind.

Now, why is this historical and moral *vraisemblance* to be ignored, while minute verbal differences between the practice of Judges and the legislation of the Pentateuch are pressed, as though they could override every other consideration? Is not this one-sided and partial exegesis?

No less one-sided is the accepted modern theory of what people call "the book Genesis." The beautiful ground-plan of the work furnished by the "eleven generations" of which it is composed receives no consideration. To this I can testify, having repeatedly called attention to it in the course of the last twenty years, but with no result, except where I could teach it in the lecture-room. The word "generations" itself critics take no pains to interpret. Whereas, if it received half the attention that Asherah, or Bamoth, or Chushan-rishathaim have had bestowed upon them, it would tell a very plain and yet a most interesting tale. Instead of this, the Jahvist and Elohist alone are listened to.

The best constructed portion of the Old Testament is described as the result of patchwork, and candidates for Orders are examined as to the effect upon divinity if the early part were Chaldæan legends sifted by Abraham through a monotheistic sieve (a fact).

I have before me an interesting example of the absurdities resulting from the Jahvist and Elohist theories, when applied to the narrative of the flood.

The writer of a certain Old Testament handbook has presented the narrative, in Genesis vi. 5 to ix. 17, in two parallel columns. On the left hand he has placed those portions which are characterized by the mention of the name JEHOVAH. On the right he places the other verses, where God is called ELOHIM. This column he calls Elohistic; the other he terms Jahvistic. They are supposed to be by different authors. Some editor has combined them into one.

A hint supplied by the late Dean Burgon, in his treatise on the Pastoral Office, long ago set me upon the task of examining the dates in the flood by the light of the Jewish calendar of twelve lunar months. The result cannot possibly be accidental. Every one knows that in certain places of that narrative, the *weekly* division of time appears. In other places the *day of the month* is given, and the year of Noah's life. By an intelligible conjecture, the writer of these tables of Elohistic and Jahvistic fragments has assigned all the week-dates to one writer, and all the month-dates to another. Thus:—

JAHVISTIC.	ELOHISTIC.
"Yet seven days and I will cause it to rain."—Gen. vii. 4.	"In the 600th year of Noah's life, in the 2nd month, the 17th day."—Gen. vii. 11.
"After seven days."—vii. 10.	"In the 7th month on the 17th day."—viii. 3.
"Yet other seven days."—viii. 10.	"In the 10th month on the 1st day."—viii. 5.
"Yet other seven days."—viii. 12.	"In the 601st year, in the 1st month, the 1st day."—viii. 14.
Also,	
"At the end of 40 days."—viii. 6.	"In the 2nd month, the 27th day."—viii. 14.

As soon as I saw that the narrative of the flood had been dissected in this fashion, I suspected what the result would be; but I confess I did not think the thing would have been done to suit *my* purpose so exactly as it has been. The Elohistic *month-dates* referred to are all *seventh days* according to the weekly reckoning furnished by the other column; as the following table will show.

NOAH'S 600TH YEAR. TABLE OF SEVENTH DAYS. NOAH'S 601ST YEAR.

Months,	2nd.	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	1st	2nd
The figures in [ ] are referred to in Scripture.	3	2	7	6	4	3	1	7	5	4	2	[1]	6
	[10]	9	14	13	11	10	8	14	12	[11]	9	8	13
	[17]	16	21	20	18	[17]	15	21	19	[18]	16	15	20
	24	23	28	27	25	24	22	28	26	[25]	23	22	[27]
	...	30	...	...	...	...	29	...	...	...	...	29	...
	29 days	30 days	29 days	30 days	29 days	30 days	29 days	30 days	29 days	30 days	29 days	30 days	29 days

According to the Elohistic and Jahvistic analysis, the fact that the rain began "after seven days" is Jahvistic. The fact that it began on the seventeenth day of the second month of Noah's six-hundredth year is Elohistic. Similarly with the subsequent dates, as I have shown above. The *week-dates* are *Jahvistic*, the month-dates *Elohistic*, according to the analysis. Now apply the Jewish calendar as above. The months have alternately thirty and twenty-nine days; and the year being lunar, consists of $(6 \times 30 + 6 \times 29 =)$ 354 days. Take the month-date of the commencement of the flood as a *seventh day* (putting the two records together), and proceed to write down all the other seventh days in the year of the flood. These days in the third month will be 2, 9, 16, 23, 30; in the fourth, 7, 14, 21, 28; and so on. In the seventh month they will be 3, 10, 17, 24. Thus *the seventeenth day of the seventh month, on which the ark rested, comes out as a seventh day!*

Again, taking up the so-called Elohistic narrative, we find that on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains were seen. The Jahvistic narrative tells us that after forty days Noah opened his window and sent out two birds. But the fortieth day after the first day of the tenth month is the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Again, our table shows us that this is *one of the seventh days* from the beginning of the flood.

Continuing the same plan, we find that the day on which the Elohist says Noah uncovered the ark, and the day on which he left it, are also *seventh days* from the beginning of the whole catastrophe.

Now suppose the Elohistic and Jahvistic analysis to be correct, as the critic makes it,—the week-dates Jahvistic, the month-dates Elohistic; the Elohist never once referring to the weeks, and in fact being ignorant of weeks altogether; and the Jahvist never mentioning a month or a year—by what *means has it come to pass that the week-dates of the one narrative coincide with the month-dates of the other*, and *vice versâ?*

The agreement is so striking that if the two narratives had come down to us independently, only a very miracle of exactness could produce such harmony. It is enough to prove the unity of the two witnesses, *supposing them to be two.*

But what are the actual facts? The so-called Jahvistic and Elohistic fragments are actually parts of one book. The Sabbath, on which depend the weeks assigned by our modern critic to the Jahvist, is really *Elohistic* in Gen. ii. 1-3. The month-dates, classed with the Elohistic portions of the narrative of the deluge, bear silent testimony to the same fact. One golden thread, picked out for the first time by a most devout believer in Genesis as the inspired work of *Moses*, is here displayed by a disciple of that believer, as holding every fragment of the narrative together in a single line. The pearls cannot be taken off the one string. It is one string of pearls, not two, that we have in our hands. The argument, moreover, is one of arithmetical agreement, which no fancies about style and language can avail to overthrow. While the Jewish (and I may add the Assyrian) calendar stands on record, the Elohistic and Jahvistic analysis cannot reasonably be applied to the narrative of Noah's flood.

I shall lay myself open to the charge of great assumption by what I am going to say next. My friend Canon Cheyne must really allow me to take an illustration of one-sided exegesis from his interesting work on Isaiah. It is quite too good to be lost. I want to show how linguistic criticism of details sometimes leads a man to ignore those aspects of truth which larger study of Scripture brings to light. The moral is, that to isolate the sacred writers from each other is not the best way to understand them.

The illustration is taken from Isaiah vi., p. 38, in Canon Cheyne's first volume (edition 1880). In verse 6 he reads, "There flew unto me one of the seraphim, with a *stone* in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar." What the *stone* may be, one is so curious to know that one immediately consults the note. It reads thus: "One of the seraphs brings a stone from the never-extinguished fire of the altar of incense." Why "the altar of incense?" one asks. Why "never-extinguished?" Where are we? In "the palace," by verse 1, not "the temple;" and a note informs us that it is "Jehovah's heavenly palace." To find an altar in heaven the learned writer is obliged to cite Rev. viii. 3, ix. 13. Surely Isaiah wrote before St. John! Overlooking the fact that it is there described as "the *golden altar*" (like the "altar of incense" to which he himself has referred,—see Exodus xxx. 1-3, which speaks of shittim-*wood* overlaid with *pure gold*), he writes thus: "*A stone*, for the heavenly altar is formed on the model of the earthly one. [Moses puts it in the opposite way,—Exod. xxvii. 8.] Ewald rightly sees an allusion to the law in the 'Book of the Covenant,' that altars should be constructed of earth, or of unhewn stones (Exodus xx. 25),—a law which evidently arose in the nomadic period *before tools were common.*"

So runs the note. The way in which mistakes are piled on one another is positively bewildering. To begin with the last. *Tools are expressly mentioned and forbidden* in the law referred to: "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it." So far as this text proves anything, "evidently" tools were just as common as altars then. Next, "the heavenly altar," *golden* by the testimony of the only places where we hear of it, is built on the model of the earthly one; that is to say, the golden altar of incense is formed on the model of an altar of unhewn stones. And "a stone" is brought from it to the prophet's lips. Why? Because, our note informs us, "Fire is the sacramental sign of moral purification" (Matt. iii. 12, Comp. Num. xxxi. 23). This is excellent doctrine. And if the seraph had brought a coal, "a live coal," as we have been accustomed to read, the exposi-

tion would be thoroughly appropriate. But *a stone*, a stone from the altar, is all that Canon Cheyne allows us. And on reference to his critical note, we find that whereas Gesenius and others translate the Hebrew word "*ritzpah*" in this place by "*hot stone*," Canon Cheyne takes all the fire out of his exposition by the statement that "*ritzpah* is not necessarily a hot stone," see Esther i. 6, &c. [where it means a *pavement*], and he adds, Vulg. rightly, *calculus*.

So that the golden altar of incense was built of *calculi!* It is more than doubtful whether the *calculus* of the Vulgate in this place has anything whatever to do with the materials of the altar. In ch. xxvii. 9, the word for stones of the altar is *lapides*, Hebrew *abânim*, a very different word. *Calculus* means a *pebble*, a small stone used for voting, a weight. To build an altar of loose *pebbles* is impossible; and to suggest that the altar of incense was a heap of pebbles, is absurd. The effect of a never-extinguished fire on pebbles would be to burst and pulverize them. Having come so far, one is moved to inquire further why the translation "live coal" has been exchanged for "stone" in this place by Canon Cheyne. To understand this we turn to the Hebrew Lexicon and Concordance. In the Concordance we find that the word *ritzpah* appears altogether seven times. Here only, in Isaiah vi. 6, is it associated with fire. Everywhere else,—viz., in Esther i. 6, 2 Chron. vii. 3, and four times in Ezekiel's vision of the temple,—it is translated "*pavement*." All these instances, however, are later than the *exile;* Isaiah's vision is "in the year that King Uzziah died." Parallel to this expression in Isaiah vi. is the only earlier instance we can compare, where the substantive *retzeph* is used in connection with the food prepared for Elijah, a cake *baken on the coals* (1 Kings xix. 6). Instead of coals the revisers give us "hot stones" in their margin, anxious to maintain the connection between the fire and the pavement. Solomon's chariot *paved* (*râtzûph*) with love completes the list.

Thus at least it stands in the *Englishman's* Hebrew Concordance. I must confess to some little surprise when, on turning to Fürst's large Hebrew Concordance, I found

ritzpah, a pavement, and *ritzpah*, a coal, derived from entirely differently roots, spelt with the same letters, but having different etymological affinities.

Why this view should be ignored without notice by a modern scholar, I cannot understand. So far as the requirements of the passages under discussion are concerned, it seems clear that for Elijah's "cake" and Isaiah's lips we need *fire*. The pavement in the other passages may do very well with *stones*. Now there is a word *resheph* compared by Fürst with *ratzaph* (the root of *ritzpah* in Isaiah vi.), that unquestionably bears the required meaning (see Cant. viii. 6). Why should there not be (as Fürst says) a word *ritzpah* with the same meaning as *rispah*, *i.e.*, a live coal; and another word *ritzpah*, meaning a *pavement?* What is the real value of the criticism that insists on giving to two words identical in sound or spelling, the same meaning, in the face of common sense? I have heard a foreigner pronounce *use* and *juice* so that one could not distinguish useless from juiceless; and the two meanings of the Latin *jus* are familiar to every schoolboy. Why, then, are we bound to suppose that the seraph brought to Isaiah's lips a cold paving-stone from the golden altar? Or was it a *calculus* after all?

But is there any reason to suppose the said altar was the *altar of incense?* Is it correct to speak of "the never-extinguished fire" of that altar, in the exposition of the Old Testament? "The fire shall ever be burning," was said of *the altar of burnt offering*, not the altar of incense (Levit. vi. 13). No such thing is said of the *incense altar*. There was no provision for it. Incense was burnt there for a few moments in the morning and evening, a sort of memorial *within* the temple of the burnt offering then offered *without*. But there is nothing whatever to show that the fire was kept up during the interval; in fact, it could not be.

And so far as Isaiah is concerned, he could not have seen the seraph take a stone, or anything else, from the incense altar, for "*the house was*" at that time "*filled with smoke*." Moreover, Isaiah was not, like Ezekiel, a *priest*, to be brought within the temple. It is morally certain that he never saw the altar of incense during his whole life.

But it was no uncommon thing to take a live coal from the brazen altar, which Isaiah must have constantly seen. Live coals from that altar were used to burn the daily incense, as we learn directly from the Talmud, and indirectly from the rule against strange fire. The purification of Isaiah's lips with a coal from the fire of the burnt sacrifice is a most just and beautiful conception. For the service of that altar was a constant type of His atonement, who "loved us, and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." By no other sacrifice could Isaiah's "iniquity be taken away, and his sin purged."

I have exposed the weakness of this piece of exegesis somewhat ruthlessly, because it affords such a perfect example of the failure of purely linguistic considerations, combined with a devout spirit, to explain the Holy Scriptures, unless the expositor also takes account of their general teaching. Six times is the sixth chapter of Isaiah cited in the New Testament. In Canon Cheyne's notes on the chapter there is absolutely no reference to the fact.

Holy Scripture is far more really the work of *one* author than of many scribes; far more one volume than a collection of separate books. It is so far systematic that our thorough knowledge of any individual portion must be in proportion to our grasp of the whole. This is not the case to anything like the same extent with human writings. You can *sample* them. A good slice of Thucydides, or Virgil, or Homer, or Plato, or any ancient classic, will give the reader a very fair notion of what the writer is. There is no very serious risk of misinterpreting the first book of the Republic of Plato, in the fact that you have not yet read the last. Not so with Holy Scripture. You cannot *sample* it. You cannot isolate the prophet Isaiah and make sure of a sound interpretation, while you refuse to consider the law of Moses, or St. Paul's quotations from the book itself. If it be asked, Why not? the answer is no modern one. "For no prophecy of Scripture is of any *private interpretation*. For the prophecy came not in the old time by the will of man. *But Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" C. H. WALLER.

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